

# Rates of menthol cigarette use among Native Hawaiians and other Hawai'i Tobacco Quitline enrollees

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Among cigarette smokers enrolled in the Hawai'i Tobacco Quitline, **over half use menthol cigarettes all or most of the time.**

Menthol use was found to be **particularly high among Native Hawaiians.**

This data highlights the importance of **monitoring menthol use.**



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## Introduction

- About one in three current cigarette users in the US reported that menthol was their usual type of cigarette (2014-15 TUS-CPS). Researchers have noted this may be even higher in Hawai'i (Fagan et al., 2016), which has the largest market share of menthol cigarettes by state (Tax Foundation, 2022).
- Menthol cigarette use has been found to be higher among various groups including racial or ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, and smokers with mental illnesses; these overlap with priority populations to be reached by the Hawai'i Tobacco Quitline (HTQL) (Truth Initiative, 2018).
- Limited data exists regarding rates of menthol use among Native Hawaiian tobacco users, another HTQL priority population.
- It is important to understand rates of menthol use because research has found that menthol smokers have higher nicotine dependence and more difficulty quitting (FDA, 2013).

## Methods

Beginning in 2020, the Hawai'i Department of Health sought more data about menthol use among HTQL enrollees who use cigarettes. This has been collected in two ways across two discrete groups:

### Retrospective cohort

The external evaluator of the HTQL added a question about menthol to the seven-month phone/web follow-up survey:

*At the time you enrolled, about seven months ago, were the cigarettes that you usually smoked menthol? (Yes/No)*

Data presented here is for N=203 respondents who had enrolled in Jun-Nov 2019. The survey response rate in that FY was 50% and data has been weighted by HTQL program (Phone or Web).

### Intake cohort

The retrospective question was later replaced by a question added at time of intake (by phone or online) to the HTQL:

*Currently, when you smoke cigarettes, how often do you smoke menthol cigarettes? (All of the time/Most of the time/Some of the time/Rarely/Never)*

Data presented here is for N=771 individuals who enrolled in Jan-Sep 2021.

## Results

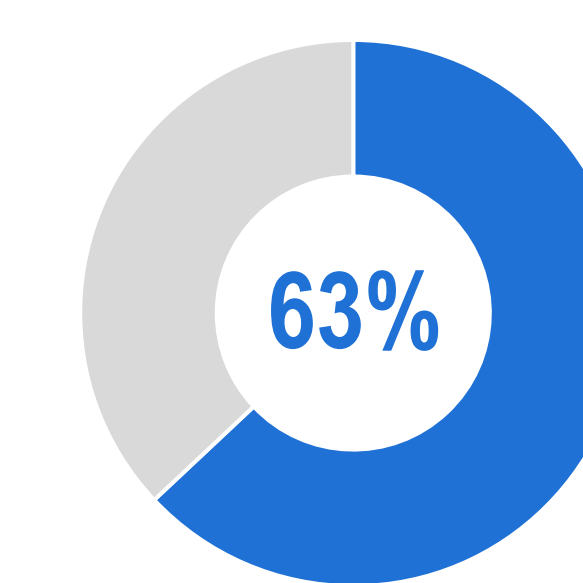
### Over half of smokers enrolling in the HTQL use menthol all or most of the time

Among cigarette users asked at intake about their frequency of menthol use, 58% reported using menthol "all of the time," with an additional 4% reporting "most of the time." (4% reported using menthol "some of the time," 4% "rarely," and 30% "never.")

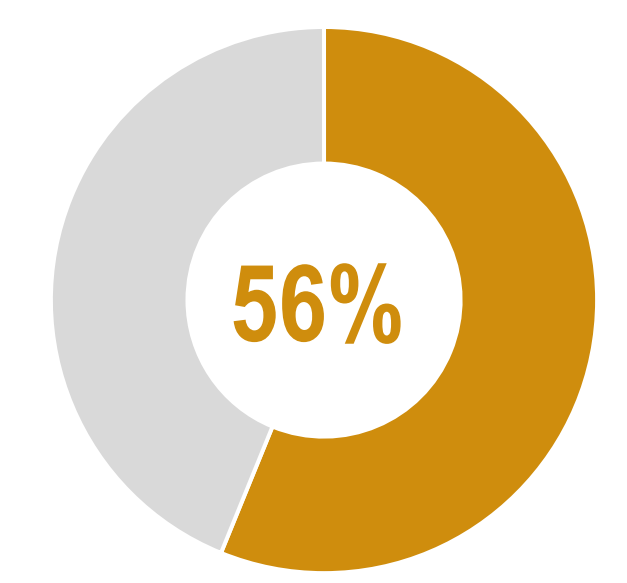
This 63% of the intake cohort who reported menthol use all or most of the time was fairly similar to the 56% of cigarette users in the retrospective cohort who reported "usually" having used menthol.

### Menthol use among HTQL enrollees who use cigarettes

**Intake cohort:**  
Smokes menthols all or most of the time  
(N=771)



**Retrospective cohort:**  
Usually smokes menthols  
(N=203)



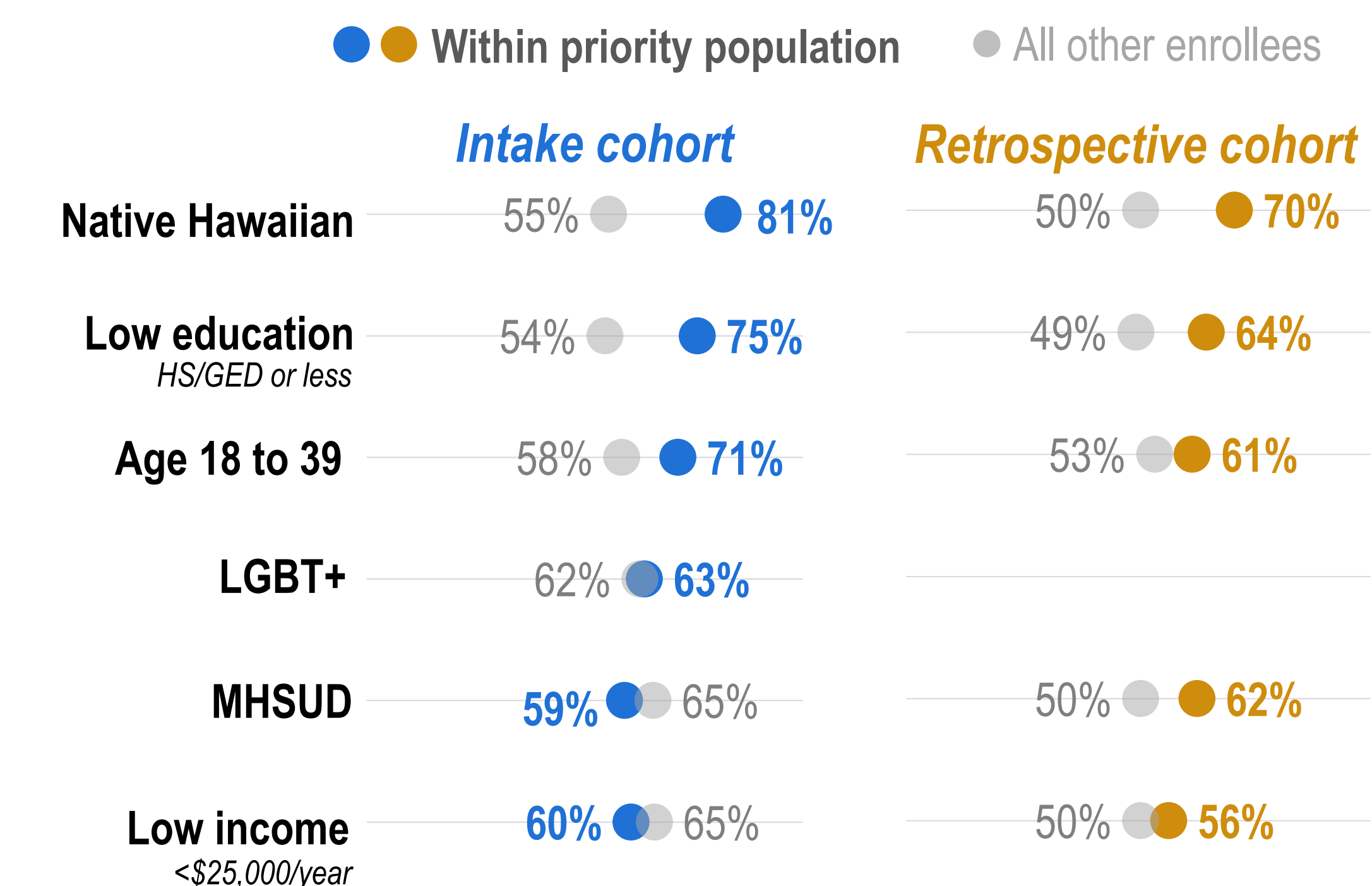
### Menthol use is higher among Native Hawaiians & enrollees with lower education

For both cohorts, enrollees who were Native Hawaiian and those who had lower education had a menthol use rate at least 15 percentage points higher than other enrollees.

In both cohorts, we also see higher menthol use among younger (age 18-39) enrollees. Among enrollees with low income, or a mental health/substance use disorder, results were less distinct and showed differing trends across the two cohorts, which could be related to attrition for the follow-up survey.

For LGBT+ enrollees, there was no difference in menthol use at intake (results from the retrospective group not shown here due to a low number of LGBT+ respondents).

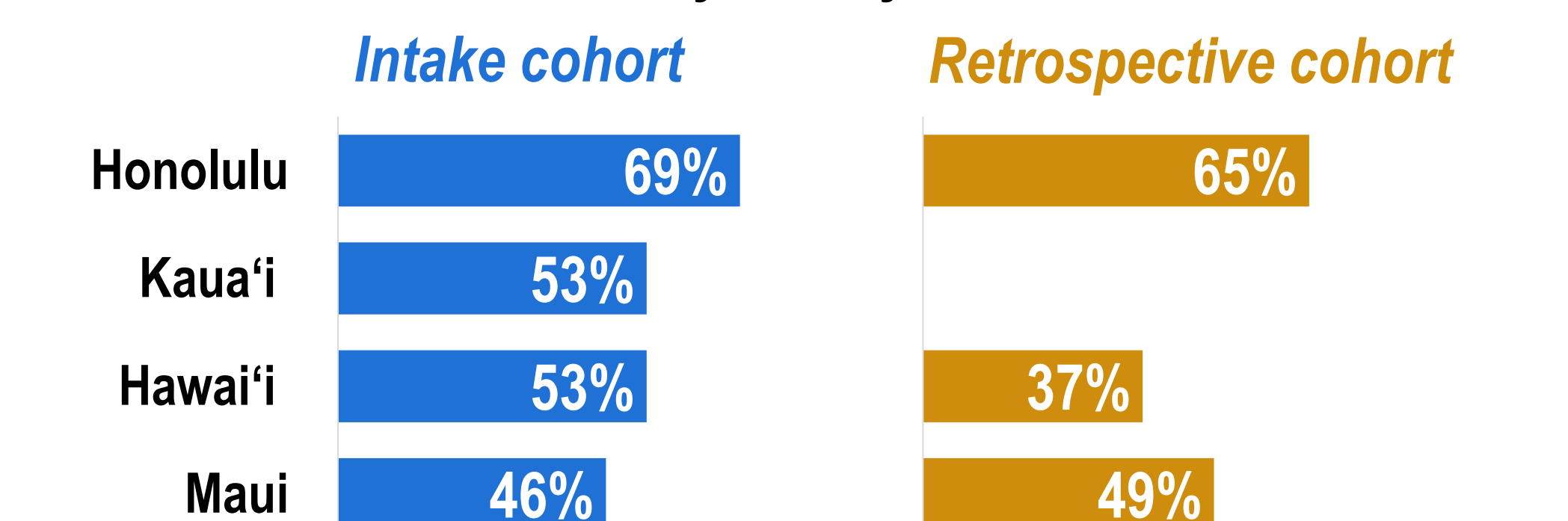
### Menthol use among HTQL enrollees who use cigarettes, by priority population



### Menthol use varied by county

Honolulu County had the highest menthol use rate across both the intake and retrospective cohorts at 65%+ reporting usual menthol use. Rates in the other counties were lower and trends varied slightly between cohorts (rate for Kaua'i County in the retrospective cohort not shown here due to a low number of respondents).

### Menthol use among HTQL enrollees who use cigarettes, by county



## Conclusions

- Menthol use is **concerningly high** among HTQL participants and more common among some groups than others, including **among Native Hawaiians**. HTQL programming and promotion could work to address this and the higher rate in Honolulu County.
- In future analysis, we will **monitor outcomes by menthol use** in order to understand its impact on quit rates among HTQL enrollees.
- Our data suggest that asking retrospectively about menthol at follow-up resulted in relatively similar trends to when it was asked at intake (to a different, but likely fairly similar, group). This suggests that **if asking about menthol at intake is not possible, a later question may be a reasonable imperfect substitute** to learn about trends.